

Suburban Hospital urged in Montgomery official's report to alter expansion

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Suburban Hospital should revamp its \$200 million planned expansion in Bethesda that neighbors have complained could disrupt the nearby community, a Montgomery County hearing examiner said.

[The 162-page report from chief hearing examiner Francoise M. Carrier](#), issued late Friday, said the hospital proposal does not mesh with long-standing county plans to maintain a residential feel along Old Georgetown Road, where the hospital has delivered health care since 1943. The report, a recommendation to the county's appeals board, can carry substantial weight when that part-time zoning panel considers the case later this year.

Suburban, a designated regional trauma center, is across the street from the National Institutes of Health in a leafy neighborhood that includes high-priced and mid-priced single-family houses, as well as medical facilities. The hospital has annual admissions of about 15,000. Last year, Suburban [became part of Johns Hopkins Medicine](#).

Suburban, which says it needs the expansion to improve its delivery of medical services, wants to grow by about 240,000 square feet and add 66 beds to give it a total of about 300. The hospital also wants to add more parking, physicians' offices and a park-like "relaxation garden" that could act as a buffer with the community.

To do this, Suburban proposed [closing part of a public street](#) and building over it -- thereby blocking a neighborhood access route to Old Georgetown Road, a major thoroughfare -- adding a parking garage and tearing down 23 hospital-owned single-family houses.

Carrier said the plans should be revised and careful consideration should be given to closing the portion of Lincoln Street, which she said could have an "adverse impact" on the neighborhood. Carrier could have rejected the plans but said "an outright denial would be contrary to the public interest in supporting an important health facility."

Carrier held a record-breaking 34 hearings before issuing the report. The next step is the county's five-member Board of Appeals, which could accept the recommendations or come up with a plan of its own. The county's Planning Board, which advises the County Council on planning matters, voted 3 to 2 in favor of Suburban's plans in 2008, after

extensive internal dissension in which some staffers said the plans were incompatible with the area's master plan.

Efforts to complete the report led Carrier to delay by two weeks her arrival at the Planning Board, where she will take the reins as chairman on June 28.

Suburban spokeswoman Rona Borenstein-Levy said Saturday that hospital officials, who are still culling through the report, are "disappointed" by Carrier's conclusions but said they would await review by the Board of Appeals.

"We hope that the board will see this important issue differently once they have had the opportunity to review all of the facts," she said.

Amy Shiman, president of the nearby Huntington Terrace Citizens' Association, which opposed the scope of the expansion, said she was hopeful that revised plans could "meet both the hospital's and community's goals."

"We are confident that Montgomery County will continue its long tradition of not just preserving, but treasuring its residential neighborhoods," she said.